

An excerpt from Gordon Tullock's 2,000 word Concept (extended definition) on **“Autocracy”**:

...Mainly, autocratic governments have been hereditary monarchies. It seems likely that the existing dictatorships, if they do not become democracies, will shift to hereditary monarchies in time. At the moment the rulers of North Korea, the area that used to be the Belgian Congo, and Syria are relatives of the previous autocrat. Libya and Cuba show signs of moving in the same direction.

Since most of the existing autocracies are not hereditary, I will start by discussing them and then turn to hereditary monarchies later. The first thing to be said about non-hereditary dictators is that they have obtained their position by climbing the slippery pole. They are normally highly intelligent, personally brave, because the contest for dictatorships is dangerous, and rather unscrupulous. They have proven their mastery of intrigue and battle, albeit the battle is mainly within the bureaucracy. Still a number of them have engaged in the kind of battle in the bureaucracy that sometimes is fatal. Almost all of them have been efficient in disposing of their rivals by deadly or less than deadly means.

In all, this is hardly a selection process that will lead to the noble and just reaching ultimate control. Still, there is no reason to believe that the winners have bad motives. They are unusually ambitious, but not necessarily wicked in any other respect. They are as likely to choose a government policy that will benefit those subjected to the dictatorship as is a democratically elected president. In both cases, intelligence, energy, ambition, and a lack of too many scruples are necessary. Once he has achieved power,

the autocrat will realize that the higher officials in his government would like to replace him. They are the instruments that he must use in governing but they are also his rivals. Keeping the system balanced so that he makes use of their talents while preventing one of them from making use of him as a stepping stone to ultimate power for himself is a difficult task, and one which he must master if he is to stay in power. Of course, any knowledge of the history of such autocracies will show that not all of them succeed in that task...

...We now turn to the more common type autocracy, the hereditary monarchy. It should be kept in mind that hereditary monarchies, if more stable than dictatorships, are by no means free of risk. Most of the readers of this encyclopedia will be more familiar with English history than other monarchies, and, as it happens, the English throne was one of the least stable in Europe. It was decidedly uncommon in England for a great-grandson to succeed to the throne peacefully. Most monarchies have been able to pass on their power with less difficulty so that three generations after the founder are reasonably common...

...Altogether, autocracies were the dominant to form of government until very recently. Whether they will continue to account for about half of all governments, or rise to complete dominance or fall back to a minority form of government is uncertain. I have my own preferences; but there is no evidence that these preferences will prevail

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